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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MASS SL UK
SUBJECT: U.S. AMBASSADOR AND IMATT COMMANDER MEETING

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY: U.S. AMBASSADOR JUNE CARTER
PERRY FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 28, 2008, Ambassador June Carter Perry and Defense Attaché Leslie Bryant met with Brigadier General Jonathan Powe to discuss the International Military Advisory Training Team to Sierra Leone (IMATT) mission, progress to date on the professionalization of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and equipping needs of the Maritime Wing. The meeting highlighted IMATT's evolution to training tactics at the company and battalion levels to operational and strategic advising at the brigade level. The UK led mission looks to downsize from 69 to 49 personnel over the next year. The projected reduction of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces from 16,000 in 2001 to 8,500 by April 2009 has been difficult due to reductions in the budget from 11M in 2005 to less than 1M in 2008 eliminating ready cash for retirement packages. Successes include the creation and standup of a courts-martial system that prosecutes serious crimes rather than discharges the perpetrators, and a more effective Maritime Wing - if fuel is provided. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Brigadier Powe told Ambassador Perry that the United Kingdom led International Military Advisory Training Team to Sierra Leone (IMATT), in place since 2001, looks to downsize from a force of what was 130 plus personnel in 2001 to what is expected to be 25 personnel by 2012 when the mission ends. The IMATT is pulling back from authority and control over all decision making in the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, promoting Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces senior leaders to assume more control and authority over decision making on personnel, missions, budgets, etc. Brigadier Powe highlighted that IMATT members are working more closely at the Brigade level on operational and strategic planning, personnel, and finance, and pulling away from tactics training at the company and battalion levels. Brigadier Powe highlighted US contributions to peacekeeping and expressed his appreciation at having three Americans assigned to the staff in the positions of a US Army logistics officer, a Marine Corps brigade level advisor and a Navy medic brigade level advisor. Brigadier Powe requested the Ambassador and the United States continue to provide personnel to the International Military Advisory Training Team mission until ¶2012.

¶3. (C) Brigadier Powe stated that the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces are making slow but steady progress in their professionalization. He noted the major achievements to be downsizing from 16,000 troops in 2001 to the projected level of 8,500 troops in 2009, with similar levels of equipment and better discipline. He also described the military as moving away from a focus on internal threats which led to coups in the 1980s and 1990s to more focus on external threats including assisting police with patrols at the borders. Brigadier Powe highlighted the military's superb work with the Sierra Leone Police in the 2007 Presidential and 2008 local elections, both of which were

considered free and fair, and for the most part non violent with a few incidences of intimidation reported in Kono. He noted the biggest obstacles to effective leadership continued to be corruption, cronyism and patronage, with many leaders feeling they were owed something for their sacrifices during years of fighting during the Civil War of 1991-2002.

Brigadier Powe also noted the military was challenged by a culture that ignored preventative maintenance, resulting in most of their equipment being non operable, or the practice of using their equipment until it is no longer operable and hoping for donor largesse for replacements. He cited a number of vehicle contributions over the past year that had resulted in the military having hundreds of vehicles but none of them are currently operable.

¶4. (C) In response to a question, Brigadier Powe described IMATT's greatest accomplishments were creating a Courts-Martial system and the training and professionalizing of the Maritime Wing. Brigadier Powe noted that prior to a Courts-Martial system, military personnel that committed serious crimes were either discharged, or theoretically being turned over to the police for investigation and further prosecution, which in practice left them to quietly escape the overburdened judiciary system before they faced punishment. The new system offers commanders a myriad of options from non-judicial punishment with extra hours of work to jail sentences for offenders, making military justice more fair and equitable. Brigadier Powe noted the Maritime Wing was benefiting from the largesse of multiple donors, with both the Chinese and United States donating boats for maritime enforcement and from the British and United States in training on enforcement capabilities. Brigadier Powe noted

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that a number of Maritime Wing members had turned down bribes offered by fishing fleets , which Powe characterized as the real mark of a professional. He went on to note that the Maritime Wing was challenged by fuel rations that mean the boats can only be operated for three or four hours a day, three days a month versus an optimum of 21 days a month, and also lack sufficient spare parts for keeping the boats operational 24/7.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Brigadier's discussion of the Maritime Wing was particularly interesting. The USG has been approached several times by both military and civilian high level officials to provide cutters to interdict illegal drug shipments and to help prevent piracy of Sierra Leone's rich fishing resources, most of which end up in Europe and deprive the country of up to \$100 million according to UK experts.
End Comment.

PERRY